# The Chinese Way of Requesting Information in Intercultural Negotiation

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**Abstract**

This study aims to explore Chinese information request behaviors, especially their preferences for directness in expressing information requests while negotiating with Americans.  The results, based on a series of in-depth interviews, indicate that (1) although "beating around the bush" is regarded by Taiwan's representatives as the best way to probe for sensitive information, they are unwilling to use the most indirect expression; (2) while choosing among direct expressions, they tend to select the least direct one (i.e., *Want*) instead of *Performative*, *Obligation*, and *Imperative*; (3) they perceive the *Silence* strategy in a negative way and show unwillingness to use it because of its destructive effects on negotiation process and negotiator-opponent relationships; and (4) they tend to focus on situational factors in explaining each side's realization patterns of information requests.  The findings only partially confirm the commonly held stereotypes concerning collectivistic societies. Further research is needed to examine specifically how the interaction of cultural factors and the situational parameters of a negotiation affect request behaviors in intercultural negotiation.

## Introduction

Gaining information about the situation of others is the major task for bargainers. Among many types of communicative behaviors, negotiation practitioners and theorists strongly argue for the importance of asking questions in acquiring relevant information (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Donohue, Diez, & Stahle, 1983; Fisher & Ury, 1987; Johnson, 1993; Lewicki, Saunders, & Minton, 1997; Nierenberg, 1973).  For example, Lewicki, et al.

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(1997) point out, "Questions are essential elements in negotiations for securing information" (p. 141).  Johnson (1993) also suggests, "If the other side knows something, a question may be the best way to find out what it is" (p. 42).

Although asking questions sounds like a simple process, respondents may withhold or distort the answer.  Information could be disguised by a number of forms, including misrepresentation of position, bluffing, falsification, deception, selective disclosure or misrepresentation to constituencies (Lewicki, 1983;  Shapiro & Bies, 1994).  Making opponents disclose true information, according to studies on deception detection, seems to need more than probing, the direct questioning of a message source regarding the veracity of information presented or requesting additional information (Buller, Comstock, Aune, & Strzyzewski, 1989; Buller, Strzyzewski, & Comstock, 1991; Stiff & Miller, 1986).  Research on how negotiators ask questions to gain valuable information, thus, becomes important for our understanding about bargaining interaction.

Currently, the knowledge about this crucial class of negotiation acts is limited.   Existing research only makes vague suggestions such as "ask productive questions" (Johnson, 1993, p. 42), "start with open-ended questions" (Johnson, 1993, p. 44), "probe with inoffensive questions" (Ramundo, 1992, p. 84), and "ask good questions" (Lewicki et al., 1997, p. 141).  In addition, most research has focused on *who* asks the question, *what* is asked, *when* it is asked, *where* it is asked, and *to whom* it is asked. Although both "*who* asks the question" and "*how* the question is asked" may determine "whether the answer is forthcoming and truthful" (Johnson, 1993, p. 42), very few researchers systematically examine *how* the question is asked in negotiation

Furthermore, the research on *how* the question is asked either defines *questions* in a restricted sense, where *questions* are limited to verbalizations phrased in an interrogative form (e.g., Nierenberg, 1973), or employs a culturally insensitive classification scheme of information request strategies (e.g., Donohue & Diex, 1985).  As we know, an utterance designed to request answers from another participant is *questioning*, without necessarily being phrased in an interrogative form (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Searl, 1976).   With regard to the expression of information request strategies, although requests are communicative acts that seem to be universal, the way people express requests varies. For example, culture influences preferred expressions of requests. Studies of request strategies across cultures suggest that cultures

differ in normative social styles of making requests (Holtgraves & Yang, 1992; Tannen, 1981).

Many attempts to set up classifications of request strategies in different languages have been established to explore preferred linguistic forms by people of different cultural groups (Blum-Kulka, Danet, & Gherson, 1985; Fraser & Nolan, 1981; Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki, & Ogino, 1986; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990; House & Kasper, 1981; Rintell, 1981; Walters, 1979). Recently, Kim and her colleagues (Kim & Wilson, 1994; Kim, Shin, & Cai, 1998) have synthesized these classifications. Unfortunately, there is little research which explores information request behaviors or patterns of people in negotiation from different cultures.

The purpose of this study is then to seek to answer the question of how culture affects people's use of requests. The author first overviews the concept of *questioning* or *information request* and the literature classifying request strategies. Then four research questions regarding Chinese negotiators' information request behaviors in intercultural negotiation are asked. Finally, self-reported data are analyzed followed by the discussion and conclusion.

## Using Questions and Culture

### Conceptualizing Questions

In negotiation *questions* refer to getting information, gaining attention, giving information, prodding the other side to think about a particular issue, and bringing about a conclusion (Zemke, 1980). Among them, requesting information is the most obvious one. As Bacharach and Lawler (1981) observe, "Bargainers are faced with the task of gaining information about the other's situation while giving little information about their own" (p.120). To gain more information from the opponents, however, negotiators need to make efforts that are more than questioning in an interrogative form. Killenberg and Anderson (1989) contend that, when questions don't sound like questions, the amount of information being disclosed from the respondent will be increased because the speaker "becomes less of a questioner and communication is likely to be more relaxed and intimate" ( p. 63).

Therefore, in this study *questioning* is treated as only one type of request to include more diversified forms of information request behaviors. From the perspective of speech act theory (Searle, 1979), requests are typical *directives* that are speech acts aiming to get someone to do something. Thus, questions designed to get someone to talk about something are requests. A *question*

here is one kind of speech act, furthermore, a *question* is defined as verbalization that has the illocutionary force of a question, without necessarily being phrased in an interrogative form (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Searl, 1976).  In other words, an utterance (i.e., Austin's "locutionary act") designed to request answers from another participant is *questioning* (i.e., Austin's "illocutionary act") (Austin, 1975).

According to Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) theory of politeness, making a request is face-threatening for both speakers and hearers.  Requests are intrusive on hearers' autonomy (i.e., Brown and Levinson's "negative face") because they are asked to do something, which otherwise would not have occurred (Becker, 1982).  On making a request, speakers also take risks in being disapproved of by receivers (i.e., Brown and Levinson's "positive face"), if listeners decline the request.  Although participants are preoccupied by pursuing instrumental goals (i.e., to achieve a desirable agreement effectively) in negotiation, participants also have face concerns about both parties' autonomy and approval (Wilson, 1992; Wilson & Putnam, 1990).  Therefore, participants have incentives to be aware of the social effects that will be evoked by various forms of information requests.  However, there is a cultural basis for a request act's relative offensiveness.  Information requests across cultural groups deserve a systematic examination.

## Classifying Information Request Strategies

Although the importance of questions/information requests in acquiring information is widely acknowledged by experienced practitioners and theorists, the knowledge about this crucial class of negotiation acts is still limited.  In addition to the rare systematical examination on how questions are asked in negotiation, researchers tend to define *questions* in a restricted sense, namely verbalizations phrased in an interrogative form.  For example, Nierenberg (1973) divides *questions* for securing information into nine types of "manageable" and six types of  "unmanageable" questions.

Another drawback of Nierenberg's classification system is its atheoretical nature.  It is not based on theoretically relevant classification rules and so is comprised of classifications that have no systematic relationship to one another.  In other words, various types of questions are typically included in this classification system for empirical rather than theoretical reasons and offer "an unprincipled crazy quilt of categories, with little conceptual coherence" (O'Keefe, 1990, p. 209).  When such an atheoretically driven classification system is applied to analyze negotiation behaviors, the consequence is that "research results using such a category system are very

nearly uninterpretable" (O'Keefe, 1990, p. 208).  Thus, theoretical answers are needed that specify what regularities observed in information request behavior are to be explained, identify what factors account for observed regularities, and explain why and how these factors affect participants' information request behavior.

Donohue and Diez's (1985) study on six types of information requests is an exception.  First, three of the Ervin-Tripp's six methods of requesting information use an interrogative form: *embedded imperatives* (Could you be more specific about your goals?), *nonexplicit question directives* (Do you know the specific goals?), and *permission* (May we have your goals, please?). The rest are *direct imperatives* (Tell us what the cost factors are here), *need statements* (We need to know the cost factors here), and *hint* (We can't figure this out).  Second, in contrast to the atheoretical nature of Nierenberg's classification system, these six information requests vary with their level of politeness which is regarded as a promising theoretical construct to develop meaningful classifications of messages (Kellermann & Cole, 1994).

However, Ervin-Tripp's scheme is too simplistic for intercultural negotiations.  We need a more culturally diversified classification scheme of information request strategies and tactics that are more useful for cross-cultural comparisons.  There have been many attempts to set up classifications of request strategies in different languages, including Spanish and English (Fraser & Nolan, 1981; Rintell, 1981; Walters, 1979); Hebrew, German, English, and Danish (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Blum-Kulka et al., 1985); Tamil, Tzetal, and English (Brown & Levinson, 1978); Korean and English (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990; Kim & Wilson, 1994); German, Danish, and British English (House & Kasper, 1981); and Japanese and English (Hill et al., 1986). Kim and Wilson's classification scheme (1994) is the most culturally-diversified one.

After reviewing more than 40 previous classifications of request or directive strategies in different languages, Kim and Wilson classify various expressions of request into three main strategy categories (cf., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Hoppe-Graff, Herrmann, Winterhoff-Spurk, & Mangold, 1985), that contain 12 mutually exclusive tactics: (a) *Hint*, comprised of tactics such as Mild Hint, Strong Hint, and Syntactic Downgraders, (b) *Query*, comprised of tactics such as Permission, Ability Query-Preparatory, Willingness Query-Preparatory, Suggestory, and Question Hint, and  (c) *Direct Statement*, comprised of tactics such as Want, Performative, Obligation, and Imperative.  Kim and Wilson define a *tactic* as "a particular sentential form and meaning that a speaker employs to

accomplish a goal," and *strategy* as "a class of similar tactics" (p. 211).  Kim et al.  (1998) further add a strategy of   *Silence* because studies of cross-cultural communication show cultural differences in belief about talk (Giles, Coupland, & Wiemann, 1992; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Scollon, 1985).

Although these classifications (Kim & Wilson, 1994; Kim et al., 1998) are not constructed for analyzing information request behaviors in negotiation, they provide culturally-diversified classification schemes for the present study. Following the scheme developed by Kim and Wilson (1994), twelve information request tactics are organized under three main strategy categories: *Hint*, *Query*, and *Direct Statement*.  Table 1 presents a classification scheme of information requests with examples adapted to a negotiation situation in which the speaker wants the receiver to say something about the requester's proposal.   With respect to *Silence* strategy, although intercultural communication literature suggests that Westerners are
less likely to use silent communicative acts than their East Asian counterparts (e.g., Kim et al., 1998), several scholars (e.g., Ramundo, 1992; Ury, 1993) recommend using *Silence* as a strategic act to push the other side to respond. In addition, Kim and his colleagues (1998) did not find support for their proposition that East Asians' are more likely to use silence.  Thus, Chinese negotiators' attitude toward using *Silence* as an information request strategy will be explored separately in this study.

**Culture and Preferred Forms of Information Requests**
Speakers can opt to express requests in either a direct or indirect way. The theoretical issues that have received the most attention with regard to requests are the questions of why and/or when speakers choose direct or indirect forms of requests.   Previous research has relied heavily on linguistic/pragmatic differences between direct and indirect forms (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987), and social factors that arise among speakers in particular situations (e.g., Ervin-Tripp, 1976).  Findings of cultural studies of preferences for expression of requests, however, suggest that cultural differences exist  in expressing requests (Ahern, 1979; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Fitch & Sanders, 1994; Keenan, 1974; Rushforth, 1981).  According to Fitch and Sanders (1994), "cultural values and beliefs, particularly ideologies, constrain the definition of social factors, and social factors in turn, constrain the pragmatic meaning of different forms of directives" (p. 242).
The question then is how to explain preferences for the way requests are expressed in different cultural groups.  Currently the dominant line of thinking for this question is using cultural-level explanations, especially the

well-known dimensions of individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede, 1983) or high- versus low-context (Hall & Hall, 1985), to explain cultural preferences in the choice of conversational strategies.  Several studies (e.g., Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Yum, 1988) suggest that East Asians prefer to signal their intentions indirectly, whereas Americans prefer to reveal their intentions directly through explicit requests.   Specifically, many empirical results are consistent with the observation that Koreans, along with Japanese, are collectivists and Americans are individualists (e.g., Hill et al., 1986; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990, 1992; Kim, 1992; Kim & Wilson, 1994; Okabe, 1987).

Table 1.  Kim & Wilson's Classification of Request Strategies/Tactics

| Category | Example |
|---|---|
| Hint Strategy | (The request is expressed by particular reference to the object or element needed for the implementation of the act or by reliance on contextual cues.) |
| 1. Mild hint | I do not have a clue. |
| 2. Strong hint | I wish I could know what you think of our proposal. |
| 3. Syntactic downgraders | I wonder if you could tell us what you think of our proposal. |
| Query Strategy | (Interpretation of the query strategy is aided by mention of the necessary preconditions for performing the requested act.) |
| 4. Question hint | Do you have any suggestion? |
| 5. Permission | May I ask you to tell us what you think of our proposal? |
| 6. Ability Query-Preparatory | Could you tell us what you think of our proposal? |
| 7. Willingness Query-Preparatory | Won't you tell us what you think of our proposal? |
| 8. Suggestory | How about telling us what you think of our proposal? |
| Direct Statement Strategy | (Requestive force is marked explicitly, making little inferential demand.) |
| 9. Want | I would like you to tell us what you think of our proposal. |
| 10.  Performative | I must ask you to tell us what you think of our proposal. |
| 11.  Obligation | You should tell us what you think of our proposal. |

12.  Imperative       Tell us what you think of our proposal.

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*Note.* Adapted from "A cross-cultural comparison of implicit theories of requesting, " by M. Kim & S. R. Wilson, 1994, *Communication Monographs, 61,* 210-235.

      Although only a few studies on Chinese request strategies (e.g., Hong, 1996; Zhang, 1995), we can expect that Chinese tend to use indirect request style because of the influence of Confucianism (Yum, 1988).  However, more empirical research is needed for understandings how Chinese request information when negotiating with Americans.  Most research comparing cultures examines two cultures independently and draws conclusions by comparing results from the two cultural groups.  As Cai and Donohue (1993) point out, intercultural theories derived from this type of intra-cultural research are useful for conceptualizing differences between cultures, but they "may be inadequate for describing actual intercultural communication processes" ( p. 24).  In other words, understanding how Chinese interact with other Chinese is not necessarily helpful for understanding the intercultural communication process between Chinese and Americans.

    Thus, it is important to examine the way two cultures interact with each other in a given context in which people accommodate and adapt to each other's language and culture (Adler & Graham, 1989; Graham, 1985).  After comparing the two contrasting perspectives of culture's influence on communication, Cai and Donohue (1993) argue that "Greater understanding of the role of culture on communication behavior can be gained by examining Americans negotiating with Chinese in Chinese language and context" (p. 25). In other words, although culture plays an important role in affecting communication behavior, other aspects of an interaction (i.e., contextual, relational, and identity factors) should not be ruled out. Based on the previous review, this study examines how Chinese negotiate with Americans in English language. The following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: While negotiating with Americans, how do Chinese request information? Why?

RQ2: While negotiating with Americans, do Chinese use *Silence* as a strategy to gain information? Why?

RQ3: While negotiating with Americans, do Chinese consider *Silence* to be an effective way to gain information?  Why?

      In addition to answering these questions, respondents are asked to evaluate the likelihood of using a set of 12 information request tactics derived

from Kim and Wilson's (1994) classification scheme.  Although Kim and Wilson (1994) have done a more finely-grained analysis in which request strategies and tactics are evaluated on five dimensions (clarity, perceived imposition, consideration for the other's feelings, risking disapproval for self, and effectiveness), no significant difference is found among four of these interactive constraints when examining Koreans and Americans. The most noticeable cross-cultural difference in effectiveness judgments was found for the *Direct Statement* strategy.  The results of Kim and Wilson's study provide initial empirical evidence for the commonly-held stereotypes concerning the relative directness of an individualistic society (U.S.) in comparison with that of a collectivist (Korean) society.  However, these authors also call for further verifying their results with samples from cultures differing along the individualism and collectivism dimension.  Thus, the final research question in this study is:

RQ4: While negotiating with Americans, what kinds of request strategies do Chinese negotiators prefer to use?

## Method

This study uses in-depth interviews to explore Chinese ways of requesting information in intercultural negotiation. The face-to-face interview allows the researcher to probe the respondents in depth and detail.

### Participants

A group of experienced negotiators who have represented the Taiwan government negotiating with Americans participated in interviews.  These negotiators were selected to represent various issue areas in international negotiations with the United States, including political affairs, tariffs, the environment, agriculture, natural resources, intellectual property, services, health-related policies, and membership of international organizations.  To be eligible, respondents had to have personal negotiating experiences at the bargaining table.  Nineteen people agreed to participate in this study on the condition that the researcher promised to keep their identities confidential. Fourteen participants were male and five were female.

### Procedures and Instrument

All interviews were conducted at the participants' offices.  Note-taking was used for gathering data because participants considered their answers to be "sensitive" and were unwilling to be recorded.  The interview time for

participants ranged from 30 minutes to two hours.  Participants were told that there was no "correct" answer to the questions and they were asked to answer questions based upon their actual intercultural bargaining experience.

Respondents were first asked to answer three research questions. To understand preferred forms of expressing information requests, interviewees were asked to go over a list of 12 types of information request tactics, which instantiated the major request strategies. They were told to delete any expression on the list which they would not use under ordinary circumstances, and to write down their likelihood of use for the rest of the expressions.  Other questions such as "Have you ever lived in the United States and for how long?" and "What do you think of the American style of negotiation?" were also included in the questionnaire.

## Results

### Request Strategies and Information Collection
When asked about how they request information in negotiations with Americans, nine of the interviewees placed more weight on preparation before every meeting than asking the other side questions in actual meetings.  Some of them suggested that fairly severe time constraints in the actual meetings make collecting information on the spot a difficult or even an impossible task.  Instead, they choose to collect information they need through utilizing their well-established personal connections with their opponents before or between actual meetings.  Specifically, three of these interviewees pointed out the importance of building a good working relationship with the other side before a problem arises.  One interviewee said that "if your job is likely to bring you into negotiating with an individual, nurture the relationship from the earliest possible point."  Another interviewee said that "the goodwill you showed to your counterparts earlier will pay off some day or other."

Nine interviewees took a more positive attitude toward questioning the other side in meetings as important means of collecting information.  One interviewee spoke highly about Japanese negotiation style because it  "keeps on asking questions to the other side," and  asking questions can "create a neutral climate for negotiation."  Others emphasize the importance of probing skills to gain information from the other side. They recommended "beating around the bush" as a way to probe for sensitive information, which can "take the other side off guard" so that they disclose requested information more

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easily.   These interviewees also suggest that good probing skills involve demonstrating one's sincerity.

**Cultural Preferences for Information Request Strategies**

To explore Chinese preferences for directness in expressing information requests while negotiating with Americans in English, the interviewees were asked to evaluate their likelihood of using a set of 12 information request tactics (see Table 1 for expressions of each type of tactic).  Of the three expressions of *Hint* strategy (i.e., Mild hint, Strong hint, Syntactic downgrader), the least direct of the 12 expressions according to a Western perspective, only two interviewees used the first expression (i.e., *I don't have a clue*), but four interviewees crossed out all three expressions.  Of the four expressions of *Direct Statement* strategy (i.e., *Want*, *Performative*, *Obligation*, *Imperative*), direct expressions according to a Western perspective, two interviewees crossed out all four expressions and ten interviewees kept only the least direct among the four expressions (i.e., *Want* tactic: *I would like you to tell us what you think of our proposal*).

Many interviewees, however, consider their likelihood of using certain information request strategies to be contingent on situational factors inherent in an interaction.  These situational factors include the nature of information requested, the phase of negotiation, the opponents' personalities, the degree of familiarity between negotiators, the relative power of each side, and the degree of mutual trust between negotiators.  A related set of data is the interviewees' answers to the question: *What do you think of the American style of negotiation?*  Six interviewees believed there are  merits in American "business-like style of negotiation" and even portrayed it as "reasonable." But the overwhelmingly impression of the American style of negotiation is negative, as documented by interviewees' descriptions of the approach as "blunt,"          "     rude,"        "pushy,"        "arrogant,"        "insincere," "provocative," "uncivilized," "forceful" and "harsh."    Furthermore,  the Americans' advantage in bargaining power, instead of cultural factors of the Westerns, is used to explain American bargaining style by these interviewees.

**The Nature of "Silence" Strategy**

When asked about their likelihood of using *Silence* in gaining information, ten respondents said that they never consider *Silence* as a strategy to gain information.  For these interviewees, "remaining silent" is usually a way to protest the other side's unreasonable proposal, a way to make the other side believe the negotiator is unwilling to make concessions, or a

way to force the other side to concede.  *Silence* as an information request strategy is a very weird idea to them.  These interviewees contended that the best way to make the other side disclose more about their negotiating goals and objectives is "asking questions instead of remaining silent."

Although a number of researchers have indicated that silence has either positive or negative value (Jensen, 1973; Lebra, 1987; Tannen, 1985), interviewees who consider "remaining silent" as an information request strategy tend to have negative evaluation about the consequences of using this strategy.  Specifically, they warn of the strategy's destructive effects on negotiation such that it will "damage your own credibility," "provoke the other side," "damage mutual trust," "put each other in an awkward situation," "create a unfavorable communication climate for negotiation," "sidetrack a negotiation," and "throw a smooth negotiation off balance".  As a result, although pausing can buy a negotiator more time to think and shift the obligation of keeping the conversation going back to the other side (Ury, 1993), the negative valence inherent in this strategy, as perceived by these interviewees, to a great extent restrains these negotiators from using this strategy.

**Situational Factors and Effectiveness of "Silence" Strategy**
Most of the interviewees who consider "remaining silent" an information request strategy emphasize the importance of weighing the relative power of each side for the effectiveness of the strategy.  When engaging in asymmetrical power structure negotiations, "remaining silent" is only suitable for the more powerful actor because strong nations can afford the cost of negative response from weak nations, which result from using this strategy. While negotiating with Americans, Taiwan is usually in a disadvantageous position.  As a result, Taiwan's representatives rarely consider "remaining silent" as an effective information request strategy for them.

In addition to bargaining power, another determinant for the effectiveness of the strategy is "negotiators' perceived competence."  One interviewee explained that the meaning attributed to pausing or remaining silent depends on the other side's perception.  It may be perceived positively (i.e., an attribution of carefulness) or negatively (i.e., an attribution of losing grasp of the subject).  The more competent the other side judges the negotiator, the more positively one attributes the negotiator's silence.  Taiwan's representatives are, unfortunately, more likely to be perceived as less competent by their American counterparts because of the perceived or actual "language barrier" (i.e., being unable to speak English as fluent as their

American counterparts) and "lack of preparation." Given these weaknesses, "remaining silent" is not an effective information request strategy for Taiwan's representatives.

## Discussion and Implications

This study explores Chinese information request behaviors, especially their preferences for directness in expressing of information requests while negotiating with Americans.  The study was based on a series of in-depth interviews with nineteen experienced negotiators representing the Taiwan government.  The results show: (1) Although "beating around the bush" is regarded by Taiwan's representatives as the best way to probe for sensitive information, they are unwilling to use the most indirect expression (i.e., *Mild hint*: *I do not have any clue*); (2) while choosing among direct expressions, they tend to select the least direct one (i.e., *Want*) instead of *Performative*, *Obligation*, and *Imperative*; (3) they perceive the *Silence* strategy in a negative way and show unwillingness to use it because of its destructive effects on negotiation process and negotiator-opponent relation-ships; and (4) they tend to focus on situational factors (i.e., bargaining power and negotiator's perceived competence) in explaining each side's realization patterns of information requests.

The results shed light on the research of negotiation behaviors.  As mentioned previously, very few negotiation studies have focused on the question of how negotiators make communicative choices to request the information that are critical for formulating the negotiated agreement.  This study fills the void by employing a culturally-diversified classification scheme of information request strategies and tactics which is derived from cross-cultural studies on request style (Kim & Wilson, 1994; Kim et al. , 1998).  This classification scheme is more promising than others for three reasons.  First, it is a theory-driven classification system based on the construct of "politeness" (cf., Nierenberg, 1973). In this classification scheme, strategies and tactics are organized with their differences in the level of politeness and explicitness.  In addition, it is a more fine-grained scheme which includes not only request in an interrogative form (i.e., *Query* strategy) but also *Hint* strategy and *Direct Statement* strategy (cf., Nierenberg, 1973).  Finally, *Hint* strategy is divided into three tactics (*Mild hint*, *Strong hint*, and *Syntactic downgraders*) with differences in the level of explicitness, and with more realization patterns of requests offered for *Query* strategy and *Direct Statement* strategy (cf., Donohue & Diez, 1985).

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The findings of this study also add insights into understanding the Chinese preferences for expression of information request in intercultural negotiation. In contrast to general beliefs, suggesting a preference of indirectness and politeness, in Chinese request behaviors held by most cross-cultural researchers, this study provides a more refined picture of Chinese request behaviors.  Specifically, Chinese negotiators tend to select the least direct approach while choosing among direct expressions, but are unwilling to use the most indirect expression.  That is, when choosing expressions of information requests with different degrees of directness/ indirectness on a continuum of directness, Taiwan's representatives tend to choose information request strategies located in the middle ground of the continuum.  A plausible interpretation of this finding is that indirectness does not necessarily imply politeness.  As Blum-Kulka (1987) argues, "a certain adherence to the pragmatic clarity of the message is an essential part of politeness" (p. 131). Manifestation of extreme indirectness can be perceived as impolite because it indicates a lack of concern for pragmatic clarity.

Furthermore, research on compliance-gaining strategies suggests that people greatly depend on the situational cues of an interaction when selecting request strategies (Boster & Stiff, 1984; Cody & McLaughlin, 1985). Therefore, the effect of culture on people's use of request strategies could be tempered by the situational factors.  This argument is supported by the findings of this study that the majorities of interviewees tend to modify their answers regarding their likelihood of using the set of 12 information request strategies/tactics by adding disclaimers such as " Being faithful to my professionalism, I have to say that how I request information always depends on what kinds of bargaining situations I am in."

Regarding the use of *Silence* as a means of gaining information, although cross-cultural literature suggests Chinese preference for the use of a *Silence* strategy (McPhail, 1996; Samovar, Porter, & Stefani, 1998), the finding of this study suggests otherwise. This study suggests that Chinese negotiators hold negative attitudes toward using *Silence* as a strategy to gain information and show strong unwillingness in using it (cf., Kim et al. , 1998).  Like their American counterparts (Giles et al., 1992), interviewees in this study interpret "remaining silent" as a sign of hostility, rejection, or interpersonal incompatibility, or a lack of verbal skills in dealing with interpersonal conflict. From the perspective of pragmatics, "remaining silent" has been regarded as the extreme manifestation of indirectness by some researchers (e.g., Tannen, 1985).  Thus, this finding provides more evidence to support the argument

that the extreme indirectness could be perceived to be impolite because of its lack of pragmatic clarity (Blum-Kulka, 1987).

Another plausible explanation of this finding could be found from the perspective of CAT (Communication Accommodation Theory) (Coupland, Coupland, Giles, & Henwood, 1988; Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, & Coupland, 1988).  Although silence may be employed "to question, promise, deny, warn, threaten, insult, request, or command, as well as to carry out various kinds of ritual interaction" (Saville-Troike, 1985, p. 6), certain conversational rules, such as the management of turn-taking, are basic conversational needs for interlocutors and might have been well-observed by negotiators no matter which cultural groups they are from.

The impact of the situational factors on the use of *Silence* strategy also should not be underestimated.  The nature of silence is ambivalence.  As Jaworski (1993) claims, "Sometimes, silence may be regarded as a sign of someone's power or control over others, or it may be a sign of a person's weakness and submission" (p. 69).  Clair (1998) also argues that, "Silence can marginalize and oppress members of society, but it can also express protection, resistance, and defiance" (p. 20).  Interviewees in this study depend heavily on situational factors of an interaction, especially the relative power of each side, to judge the appropriateness of using a *Silent* strategy.   When asked to explain why they do not regard "remaining silent" as an effective method to gain information, they argue that, while negotiating with a powerful opponent like the United States, impolite acts such as  "remaining silent" is likely to provoke them by which Taiwan just cannot afford it.

In sum, the findings of this study provide a more refined picture regarding Chinese negotiators' information request behaviors.  Results of this study only partially confirm commonly held stereotypes concerning collectivistic societies.  Especially, the results of the interviewees' strong concerns about the influence of the contextual, relational, and identity factors in explaining their strategic planning of information request behaviors are unexpected. Thus, future studies on intercultural negotiation should examine how the interaction of cultural factors and the situational parameters of a negotiation affects request behaviors in intercultural settings.

To explore how culture and other situational elements interact to affect how people negotiate in intercultural contexts, more substantial evidences can be collected by using the method of participant observation in the actual interaction between Chinese and Americans for future research.  Through participant observation, researchers can observe and analyze actual interaction among  participants  instead  of  participants'  retrospective  self-reports.

Moreover, when field research is impossible, recorded data from a simulation of negotiation situation are also recommendable (e.g., Cai & Donohue, 1993).

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